



State Universities  
of Massachusetts

September 14, 2016

Dear members of the Special Commission on Interstate Reciprocity Agreements,

On behalf of the Massachusetts State Universities Council of Presidents, I offer this testimony on the participation of Massachusetts in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). SARA is a voluntary agreement among member states and U.S. territories establishing comparable national standards for interstate delivery of postsecondary distance-education courses and programs. We believe there is value for Massachusetts students if the Commonwealth participates in SARA and we urge you to consider the benefits of such an initiative for the state and all its institutions.

We understand that the Commission has a wide ranging mission beyond this one agreement, but we hope that consideration will be given to participation in SARA because this agreement is essential to the growth of Massachusetts' institutions.

The current authorization system is inefficient, time-consuming, expensive, and ineffective and does not support our mutual goal of ensuring quality distance-education options for our citizens. SARA is a welcome development for all higher education institutions because the investment required to maintain knowledge of changing regulations in every state – and to develop applications for those states that require it is onerous. We owe it to our students and institutions to focus on efficiencies. The current inefficient, duplicative and costly system of distance-learning regulations, does not allow us to do so.

It's important to take into account the changing demographics and needs of nontraditional students, including adult learners, who are seeking postsecondary education to advance their career skills. This increasing population needs flexibility and requires convenience to continue their education.

As a high quality and affordable providers of graduate and continuing education, the Massachusetts State Universities collectively educate over 20,000 students each year. Because distance education is a growing national industry, quality assurance and consumer protections are more critical than ever. SARA raises the quality bar for more states, and develops a system through which member states can communicate effectively in order to better serve their students. SARA's uniform standards eliminate the timely and costly process for an individual institution to register its courses and programs in 50 different states and four territories.

With this in mind, a national reciprocity agreement like SARA is critical for our institution to compete and be successful. Distance education is a key tool in increasing the educational attainment of our state's residents, and SARA will significantly sharpen this tool. SARA allows our institutions to effectively compete and collaborate with the institutions from the over 40 states that have already joined the agreement. Without SARA, we have turned away students from states for which we have not secured authorization. We will continue to do this as resources needed to annually seek authorization for all states is prohibitive. Please give us a chance to enhance our distance-education enrollment and serve our students to the fullest extent.

Thank you,

  
Vincent A. Pedone

State University Council of Presidents  
Executive Officer